



**Directorate of  
Intelligence**

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# **El Salvador: Evaluation of Government Military Operations in the Guazapa Volcano Area**

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NGA Review Complete

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**El Salvador: Evaluation of Government  
Military Operations in the Guazapa  
Volcano Area**

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Summary

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[redacted] the Guazapa Volcano area of El Salvador as of late August 1983, the El Salvadoran armed forces had successfully driven most of the insurgents out of their previously secure base area. All of the insurgent camps and defensive positions within this area have been abandoned or are occupied by government troops.

It appears that the present government commander of the Guazapa area, Col. Blandon, will continue to keep pressure on the insurgents and prevent them from reestablishing a major base in this area. The insurgents will, however, probably be able to continue to maintain a presence in the Guazapa area by using small, more mobile units to conduct ambushes and other operations.

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Information available as of 8 September 1983 was used in this report. [redacted]

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The author of this paper is [redacted] Office of Imagery Analysis. Comments and queries are welcome and may be directed to the Chief, Third World Forces Division, [redacted]

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## Introduction

Since at least early 1981 until February 1983, insurgents controlled a base area near the Guazapa Volcano in north-central El Salvador. As of January 1983, this base area occupied about 130 square kilometers (figure 1). The insurgents used this strategic base for launching operations, troop housing and training, storing arms and other supplies, raising food, and as a safe haven for insurgents escaping from government operations in other areas. [redacted]

25X1 The Guazapa base area contained at least five major insurgent base camps and seven other major defensive areas (tables 1 and 2). Small camps for mobile units probably also existed [redacted]

25X1 [redacted] The insurgents controlled access to the base area by digging trenches across the major roads leading into the area and by manning defensive positions that controlled the roads and trails near each base camp. 25X1

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25X1 [redacted] armed combatants from the five factions of the Farabundo Marti National Liberation Front (FMLN) were based in the Guazapa base area prior to February 1983. [Reference 1] About 700 of these were from the Armed Forces of National Resistance (FARN), and there were about 200 each from the Popular Liberation Forces (FPL), the Peoples Revolutionary Army (ERP), the Armed Forces of Liberation (FAL), and the Central American Workers Revolutionary Party (PRTC). The actual number of combatants in the area probably fluctuated considerably depending on the level of military activity in other parts of the country--decreasing when insurgents from Guazapa supported operations in other areas, and increasing when government operations forced insurgents from other areas to seek safety there. [redacted]

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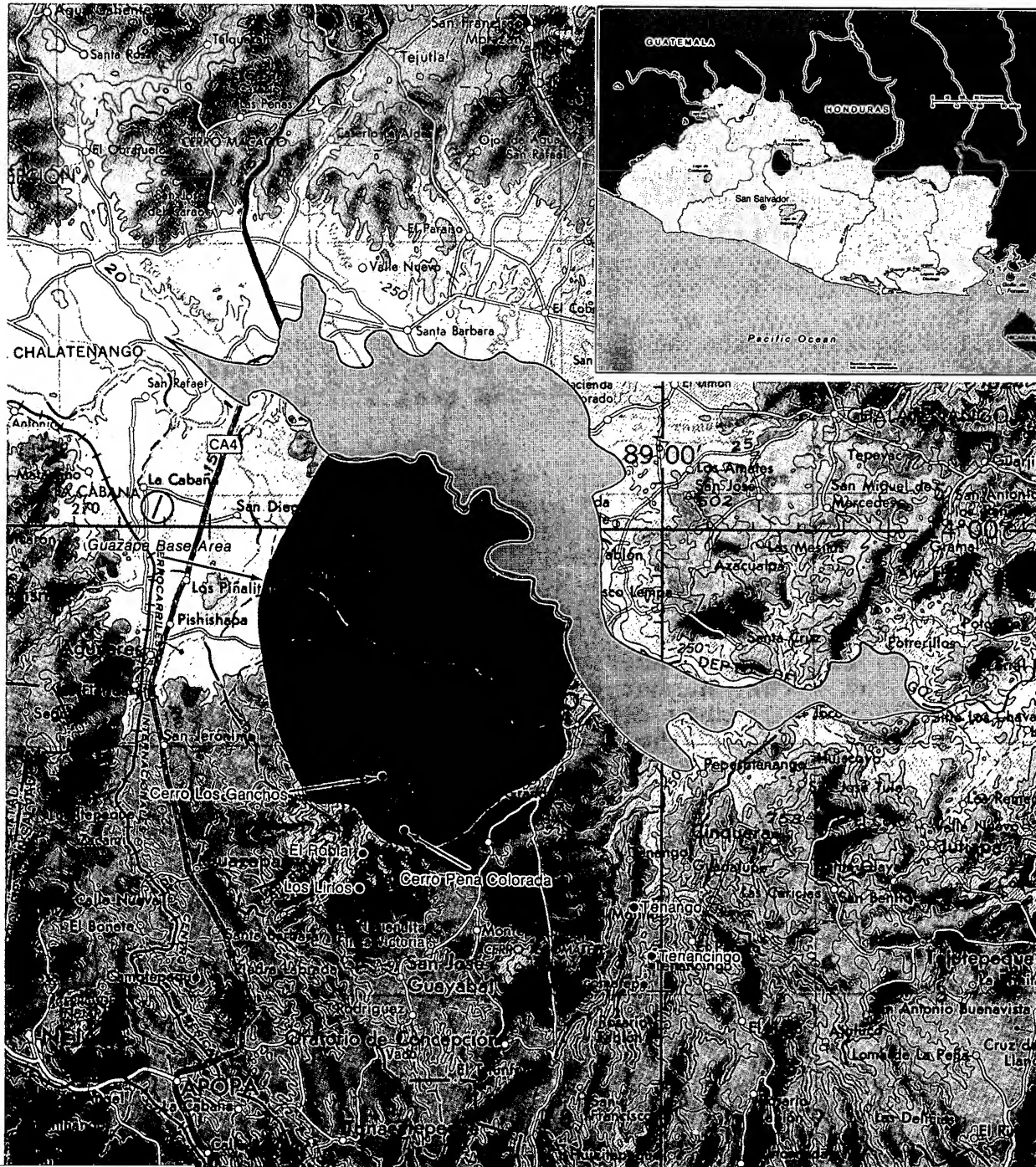
## Discussion

The El Salvadoran armed forces (ESAF) have maintained pressure on the insurgents in the Guazapa Volcano area with near-continuous operations since late February 1983. This continuous application

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Figure 1

Guazapa Volcano Base Area, Cuscatlan Department, San Salvador



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of offensive pressure contrasts with previous practices.<sup>1</sup> As of late August these operations had been successful in keeping the insurgents off balance. [redacted] the insurgents have been gradually driven out of their Guazapa base area and, as of late June, were moving generally east of the base area. [2] This has reduced the immediate threat of attack on the capital of San Salvador, which is about 25 kilometers south of the Guazapa area. There is no evidence that the insurgents have established permanent base camps to replace those abandoned in the Guazapa base area. [redacted]

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During the period of August 1982 to February 1983, there was only one significant government operation in the Guazapa area. That operation, conducted by the Ramon Belloso Battalion on the east slopes of the Guazapa Volcano, was successful in making contact with the insurgents, but it failed to produce any lasting results. Beginning in late February 1983, ESAF units, including the First Brigade and the Atlacatl Immediate Reaction Battalion, conducted a series of operations--Operation "Guazapa X" in late February; a series of three smaller operations called "Salitre" in April, May, and early June; and another large operation called "Guazapa XI" in July. Since July the ESAF has launched at least two other operations against the insurgents--one on the southern edge of the base area, and another to the east of the base area. These operations were conducted in the areas where two new insurgent camps had been established between mid-April and late July (table 1). [redacted]

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they were dismantled during the operations. [3] Apparently the insurgents had received advance warning of the operations from members of the International Red Cross and relocated to Chalatenango and San Vicente Departments to avoid contact. [4] [redacted]

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As of late August 1983, government forces occupied the former insurgent defensive positions at Cerro Pena Colorada and Cerro Los Ganchos. They also continue to maintain a force at a govern-

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<sup>1</sup>One of the major reasons for the recent ESAF success in the Guazapa area apparently has been the leadership of Col. Blandon. Since becoming commander of the First Infantry Brigade in late 1982, Col. Blandon has shown no signs of backing off from the aggressive tactics he has used in the Guazapa area. Blandon does not appear to be satisfied with driving the insurgents out of their base areas, and he has not removed the government forces when a military operation has been completed. [redacted]

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ment base at El Roblar. These positions are strategically located overlooking many important areas, including the major north-south and east-west roads and five abandoned insurgent camps. The ESAF should be able to prevent the insurgents from reestablishing this base area by maintaining these positions and patrolling the surrounding countryside. The First Brigade has left a permanent force of two companies in the vicinity of Tenancingo and a force of three companies on the Guazapa Volcano. These troops are to carry out pacification efforts in the area and provide security for the local populace. [REDACTED]

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Although the insurgent base camps have been neutralized and the ESAF has garrisoned troops in the Guazapa area, the insurgents probably will still be able to maintain a presence of small, mobile units. These units probably will conduct ambushes and other limited operations against the ESAF and against vulnerable economic targets, such as bridges. The Guazapa area can be pacified only after the campesinos, who were driven out by the insurgents, return to their homes and the ESAF gains their trust and confidence. [REDACTED]

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**Table 1**  
**Abandoned Insurgent Camps In and Near the Guazapa Volcano Base Area**

Name	Remarks	
Mirandilla 13-55-30N 89-06-15W	Established prior to mid-January 1982. It consisted of 11 buildings, five defensive trenches, six foxholes, and four observation posts.	
La Presa 13-55-20N 89-03-35W	Established prior to February 1982. It consisted of a housing area, [redacted] and at least one defensive trench.	25X1
El Platanar 13-56-25N 89-03-45W	Established prior to February 1982. It consisted of a housing area, [redacted] and two defensive trenches.	25X1
Concepcion Chaparral 13-57-00N 89-03-05W	Established prior to February 1982. It consisted of a housing area and at least two defensive trenches.	
Palo Grande 13-55-40N 89-04-20W	Established prior to September 1982. It consisted of a housing area [redacted]	25X1
Tenango* 13-51-55N 89-00-45W	Established between mid-April and late July 1983. It consisted of one defensive trench, 15 foxholes, one bunker, and a housing area. This camp was [redacted] dismantled by government troops in late August 1983.	25X1
Los Lirios* 13-52-20N 89-06-50W	Established between mid-April and late July 1983. [redacted] This camp was [redacted] dismantled by government troops in late August 1983.	25X1 25X1

\*Camps that were established outside the base area after the government operations began.

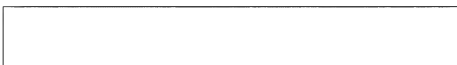
[redacted]



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**Table 2**  
**Areas of Defensive Positions in the Guazapa Volcano Base Area**

Name	Remarks
Cerro Los Ganchos 13-54-45N 89-06-20W	Established prior to February 1982. It consisted of two defensive trenches and two observation posts. As of late August 1983, it was occupied by government troops.
Cerro Pena Colorada 13-53-40N 89-05-30W	Established prior to February 1982. It consisted of three defensive trenches and one observation post. As of late August 1983, it was occupied by government troops.
Los Gramales 13-55-00N 89-04-00W	Established prior to February 1982. It consisted of at least two defensive positions. As of late August 1983, it was abandoned.
Hacienda Seretal 13-58-00N 89-03-00W	Established prior to February 1982. It consisted of one defensive trench and one foxhole. As of late August 1983, it was abandoned.
Hacienda El Barrio 13-57-20N 89-03-10W	Established prior to April 1983. It consisted of at least one defensive position. As of late August 1983, it was abandoned.
Consolacion 13-59-00N 89-05-00W	Established prior to February 1982. It consisted of one defensive trench and two foxholes. As of late August 1983, it was abandoned.
Buena Vista 13-56-25N 89-07-00W	Established prior to September 1982. It consisted of three defensive positions. As of late August 1983, it was abandoned.



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**References**

**Documents**

Document references are available upon request.

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